Determination, Creativity, & Stamina

Professionalism and Investment Level on the Job

You have finished the program and landed your first MT job—congratulations! I hope you took a day or two to celebrate your accomplishments because now things will really get serious. Your behavior at this point will reflect your investment level, and professionalism. The same determination, creativity, focus, and stamina that it took to get here will continue to be called upon to learn your new accounts, and the specifics of your new job, establish your professional reputation, increase your production, and grow your paycheck.

You will need determination to tackle the myriad of new information about your employer’s platform—the hardware and software that make up the particular work environment and facilitate the work to be done. You will quickly realize that learning never ends for an MT! Employers have little patience for scaredy-cats or technophobes, and even less for whiners. You will be expected to learn the programs and procedures needed for the job, and that is that. It always seems daunting at the beginning, but by now you know that what seems impossible the first day will become second nature in time. There’s no way around it, so give yourself a little pep talk, gather up your determination, and jump in!

You will need creativity to continue to juggle the needs of your personal life with your job. Many of us find that living and working in the same space creates some unique problems, especially regarding where to draw the line between the two roles, and managing family members so they recognize and respect that. This is definitely something you dealt with during your education, but when your only responsibility was to your own study plan, it was a bit easier to make that line a little blurry. Now, with a definite turnaround time and a boss, it’s a very sharp line, and the needs of the job are very much a priority. No employer will be happy to be told that the reason you were late logging on, or the work is three hours late, is because you cannot manage your personal life effectively. Emergencies are the exception, of course, but for most of us, true emergencies are few and far between. Make sure you are prompt and reliable from the very first day.

“Employers have little patience for scaredy-cats or technophobes, and even less for whiners.”

You will need focus to stay with those mmmmmbleespeedytalkers while they power through their lengthy ENT dictations, rarely ever actually pronouncing all the syllables in the words. You will need focus to stay alert while Dr. Ummmm… uhhhhh… [shuffle papers]… ahhhh… [background conversations with the nurses]… ummmrrr… gets his information together and finally spits out the facts of the cardiology consultation. Even after you know these characters very well, and their dulcet tones curl comfortably into your ears, you will need focus to make sure you catch the small deviations and to not feel so familiar that you don’t listen carefully. You will need focus because a patient’s private medical information is in your hands; always remember this.

Continued on pg. 9
Welcome to the summer issue of Stepping Up! Here in the high mountains of Utah the backyard garden scene is finally underway, and outdoor events can be planned with confidence at last. We love summer, but the long, lazy days our kids look forward to seem to have disappeared, at least for us. There’s so much to do, and so many wonderful distractions, it can be challenging to buckle down to the coursework or to the home-based job of medical transcription, and so it’s appropriate for this issue’s theme to address professionalism in terms of reliability, commitment, taking responsibility, and personal investment level.

Professionalism and Investment Level on the Job is written for the recent graduate or newbie on the job; Work for What You Bargained For discusses professionalism and personal investment in the program for the current student; A Grader’s Perspective tackles the question of flagging on employment tests; Finders, Keepers explores how to effectively use the Benchmark Knowledge Base reference collection; and The Squeaky Wheel reminds us of the need for critical thinking in It’s Not What You Hear; it’s What the Doctor Says! Our issue rounds out with the familiar Dear Susan, Speech Wreck (now a cartoon!), Mixed Media, Med Gab, Student Spotlight, and Employer Zone. Finally, we’re excited to hear your thoughts on a new offering we’re calling Working From Home, this month addressing the topic of working-mom guilt. Please let us know what you think!

Wishing everyone a wonderful send-up to summer, with a reminder to stay on track while having some fun—and don’t forget the sunscreen!

Thanks for reading!

- Jill McNitt, Editor

The Squeaky Wheel

It’s Not What You Hear, It’s What the Doctor Says

Very often we talk with students who are miffed about how quickly a doctor is speaking, how muffled the audio file is, or how hard it is to understand a dictator’s accent. “There is no way I can understand anything this doctor is saying,” some students say. “Have you listened to this sound file?” is their next question. And then there’s even “I swear he says [this word] at the end of that sentence, but it just doesn’t make sense.” Some of these doctors are difficult to understand, it’s true, but luckily, you do not have to read doctors’ minds; what you do need to do, however, is transcribe verbatim as much as you can, do your research, proofread, and then simply let yourself leave a flag if you just can’t understand that one darn word. Most importantly, use your common sense.

As we all know, verbatim means “word for word.” You may be asking yourself, “How am I expected to transcribe verbatim, yet it’s okay to not get a 100% match with the report key?” Good question. Let’s break this down.

Remember playing the telephone game as a kid? Your friend whispers into your ear: “I want to drive a red car with racing stripes when I’m older.” But all you hear is, “Let’s fly a star-lit kite when it gets colder.” A star-lit kite? Really? And why would you want to fly a kite when it’s cold outside? Even though you pass this ridiculous sentence on to your other friend in line, your brain automatically tells you that you didn’t hear it correctly, and your common sense tells you to wait until the end of the game to find out what was really said. Use this same logic when transcribing reports. Although the words in a medical report may be more difficult than “kite” and “stripes,” you have a lot of resources that can help you. Make sure to use context clues, and see if they can help you determine what the subject of the sentence or phrase might be. It’s also helpful to know how to use your medical dictionaries.

Here’s an example: Let’s say that you’re transcribing a clinic note report, and you’ve made it to the objective portion. At one point, you can determine that a word starts with kerAH— and you think there’s a second word that sounds like boots. Well, first off, your common sense and medical terminology knowledge tell you that the doctor isn’t saying kerahboots. Using the context clues, you can hear that the very next sentence contains information about the heart tones having regular rate and rhythm. Okay, well kerahboots + heart = what? So you move on to your resources.

Using Benchmark KB and knowing you only need to type in the first three letters of a word to get results, you immediately type in kera. Oh man, eleven pages of results come up. Not only that but things like Kerfoam and Kerandel sign pop up. After looking at their definitions and realizing the doctor probably is not talking about nail
Work For What You Bargained For

Professionalism and Investment in the Course

We usually hear the term “investment” when we’re talking about businesses, cars, homes, and stocks because we put our assets into something and get something back. For example, we may invest in a beat up old car by getting the air conditioning fixed, repairing the brakes, and putting on a set of new tires. Why? Because this improves the value of the car, and allows us to resell it for more than we bought it for—and then we can use the profits to buy a better, newer car. Everyone knows that money will not grow underneath your mattress, no matter how lucrative your dreams are! You can apply this investment > reward mechanism to many areas other than money—like your training program! Just as an investment of money and repair to an old car increases its resale value, your investment of time and energy into your education and your current MT program can reward you with very high returns.

As you work through your course, remember that everything you learn is an investment for the future. Remind yourself often that all of the medical terms you’re learning and the hundreds of reports you’re transcribing are, in fact, helping you reach your goal. The training is a taste of the real job; the way you approach your program is probably how you will approach your job. Ask yourself this: How will the time I’m dedicating to the course now reflect in my work experience later? If you are not able to dedicate time to study, you will struggle to find time later for the job. If time management is a challenge, recognize it as such; instead of ignoring the problem and hoping circumstances will somehow just change, look the challenge in the eyes and find a solution that works for you. If you can find a way to study effectively and efficiently at home, you’ll be able to work at home successfully. Be willing to try new things. Your efforts are worth it if they improve your skills for the future.

A lot of good, dedicated students do well until after the midterm, but beginning the practicum throws them for a loop. No matter how much background information you have, there’s nothing quite like actually doing the task of transcription! If you find that you are having some trouble with the practicum portion of the course, rest assured that you are normal. It takes time to get used to using a foot pedal, understanding the doctors, learning the shortcuts and using a word expander program, researching medical terminology in the most reliable resources, concentrating on accuracy, and so on. The important thing is to keep going, and don’t give up! Medical transcription and medical editing are skill sets that require a lot of practice to develop. Make sure you dedicate the necessary amount of time every day to develop your skills so you can receive a return on your investment.

Here are a couple of tips you can implement into your studies to help you succeed in the practicum portion of the course.

First, if you are in the practicum portion of the course and have not yet listened to the transcription webinar, please do so. This webinar presentation is found on page 16 of the Clinic Notes Transcription module. This webinar will provide you with tips on how to successfully complete and learn from the transcription reports. A large part of the webinar covers the three-pass method, where you first transcribe what you can easily hear, then research the difficult stuff you couldn’t hear the first time, and lastly (after submitting your report for comparison with the key) read, listen, and learn to make sure you understand everything. Remember, medical transcription is so much more than just listening and typing!

Second, remember that medical transcription is definitely a skill that requires consistent practice. Just like so many other things, if you don’t use it, you’ll lose it. Set small, achievable goals each day. Whether you can spend four hours or one hour each day, just do it! If you can only transcribe for one hour a day, stick to that one hour each day—consistency is so important. You’ll learn and develop and retain so much more by sticking with a consistent study schedule than if you do a lot here and there, between long breaks. Once you begin working as an MT, you will be expected to stick to a schedule. Practice doing this now so you are prepared for the workforce. The old fable about the turtle and the hare really applies in this case!

Learning to be a great transcriptionist takes time and effort and a real investment in terms of time and dedication, but the returns can be very rewarding! As you continue to work through your program, try to remember that the more you invest in your training and education, the greater the rewards will be.

- Melanie Gassin
CS Skills Assessment Team
CS Graduate Support Team
“FLAG…FLAG…FLAG…”

“Flag, flag, and more flag!…”

“Yes, flag, flag, flag…” “Don’t forget FLAG, FLAG, FLAG!” Have you ever done a forum search for “flag”? With 145 pages of results, it can be overwhelming to wade through all of the opinions and instructions and suggestions on flagging. Flagging is an extremely important practice when taking both the final exam and employment tests, so it’s important to understand how to flag. Another very important aspect that should not be overlooked is that the guidelines for flagging are often different for these two types of tests.

Most companies prefer—or even require—that MTs use only blanks, not guessed flags. This means that if you are not sure of what is being dictated, you must leave underscores (or some other black characters) to indicate where there was dictation that you could not accurately transcribe. That’s right; throw those parentheses and “s/l” markers out the window. In most cases, transcription companies want to see what you know, not what you think you might know. With these companies, flagged guesses incur the exact same deduction points that any other error would incur (unlike the final exam in which incorrect flagged guesses only incur a 1/2-point deduction, while errors that are not flagged may incur up to a 2-point deduction). On the other hand, leaving a blank on an employment test usually incurs only a very minor deduction (as little as a 1/4 of a point), if any deduction at all.

Stop and think about that for a moment to make sure you fully understand the consequences of using guessed flags rather than blanks on employment tests. A single guessed flag may incur up to a 3-point deduction, while using a blank for that same term may incur as little as a 1/4-point deduction, if any deduction at all.

When testing, the best way to leave a blank is to use underscores: __. This is the key right next to the zero, and it requires you to use the Shift key with it so that it does not produce hyphens. Using other black characters is also generally acceptable, such as the pound sign: ####.

If no specific instructions are provided, using 3-5 underscores per blank is adequate. Another option is to use underscores that roughly match the length of the dictation that could not be transcribed. One important caveat: Never get frustrated and leave something ridiculous, like a 9-inch stretch of underscores to show your frustration. First, an excessively long line of underscores will alter the way the test looks to the grader, stretching it in all kinds of weird ways. It will annoy them. Second, employment tests are not the appropriate place to have a temper tantrum. Companies need to be able to rely on their MTs to work professionally, and venting frustration on an employment test is a sure way to let them know that you are not professional.

Do not combine your transcription blanks with confidentiality blanks. If you cannot understand the dictation immediately before or immediately after an audio beep used to conceal PHI (protected health information: name, date, physician, etc.), use separate blanks—one for the PHI audio beep and one for the information you cannot understand. Combining these two blanks into one blank could result in a deduction for omitted dictation since it was neither transcribed nor represented by its own blank. For example:

D: The patient presented to the ER on [beep].
T: The patient presented to the

___ ___ (Note: You may also include [DATE] if you so choose.)

In the “not” example, it is unclear if the transcriptionist intended for the blank to represent “ER on” or to represent the audio beep. In the correctly transcribed “T” example, it is clear that the MT realizes they could not understand where the patient presented and thus left a blank.

As important as knowing how to use a blank is knowing when to use a blank. A test littered with blanks indicates that the MT needs to further develop their skills before gaining employment. This is not the impression you want to give if your skills are actually adequate and it’s your confidence that is lacking. On the other hand, don’t convince yourself that you know more than you do just for the sake of avoiding the use of blanks; this will come back to bite you. Use your reasoning and research skills, and find a balance.

There is a minority of transcription companies that allow—or even encourage—the use of flagged guesses on employment tests, just like on the final exam. Even with flagged guesses, there are a couple of things to keep in mind.

First, if it doesn’t make sense, don’t transcribe it. Enclosing it in parentheses, accompanying it with “s/l,” or presenting it any other way, transcribing nonsense will never make you look good. I cannot count the number of times I have seen MTs transcribe “onisis” instead of “illnesses.” Flagged or not, it simply does not make sense: childhood onisis? sexually transmitted onisis? no recent exposure to onisis? In fact, to my knowledge, it is not

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Hello. This is Nancy Kratts reporting from Plattsburgh, New York! (I have always wanted to say that.) I live with my husband, Scott, and the cat, Spyder. Erica, our only child, is living in an apartment in a nearby town.

I currently work full time as an ICU Unit Clerk at CVPH Medical Center. My main duties are to read the doctors’ orders and record them into the electronic file. This, in and of itself, can be daunting given the fast-paced penmanship many doctors have demonstrated. To go from reading speed writers to listening to speed talkers seemed like a natural progression for me. My interest about becoming an MT piqued after seeing an open job posting at work. With my advancing age, high gas prices, and driving home in the dark, I would love to become a work-at-home employee.

Presently I am in the Medical Transcription course. I began this journey in May 2011. I must admit there have been some rough spots along the way, but I certainly have learned volumes. The first 10 modules went well, with the exception of a small section called the Grammar & Punctuation module. I checked out the forum while in that module and heard conclusive evidence that it was not just me, which made me feel much better. I ordered the companion books, which has enabled me to read during the lulls at work and has helped me to continue with my study planner timeline. With a full-time job, being able to do this course online is the only reason I am even here, and having the books is icing on the cake.

I have made it as far as Clinic Notes. I went through a transition period when I reached the transcription module and have slowed down a bit from my previous progress, but I am learning and hopefully retaining most of it. It is such a thrill when a flagged “sounds like” guess is correct.

Retaining what I have learned has driven me for some time now. Mom and Dad were both diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. With the strong risk factors for both genetic and family history, this disease frightens me. So in my own way, I am trying to suppress the progression of this memory thief by keeping my synaptic plasticity functioning at maximum capacity, hoping that it helps; time will tell.

Finally, the forum has been my best friend throughout this whole online education process. My screen name is Iceborg. Any student of a Career Step online course should incorporate the forums into their study plan as a place to ask questions and get answers, for camaraderie and support. I joined the “KEEP ON KEEPIN’ ON” group this past summer for the above reasons. Now I am List Mistress of the weekends for the 5-A-Day list, which is the motivational reward system for those who post their progress through the course. Everyone is more than welcome to stop in and say hello! I’ll see you there!

- Nancy Kratts

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Layman’s Dictionary of Medical Terms

Enteritis: a penchant for burglary
Genes: blue denim slacks
Hangnail: coat hook
Haemorrhoid: a male From outer space
Herpes: what women do in the Ladies Room
ICU: Caught you
Labor Pain: hurt at work
Medical Staff: a doctor’s cane
Minor Operation: coal digging
Morbid: a higher bid
Nitrate: cheaper than the Day Rate
Node: was aware of (knowed)
Organ transplant: what you do to your piano when you move
Organic: organ repairman
Outpatient: a person who has fainted
I refused to believe that my hearing was that bad... I purchased a pair of Sennheiser over-the-ear HD 280 pro. I love them. They are big looking but are lightweight. I am a person with a small frame and they are fine. I got them online. I shopped for a sale and got them for $75.00...

I have a set that I use at home and a set that I use when I travel. The set I use at home are several (5-6) years old: Sennheiser HD 280 pro. They are spendy but worth their weight in gold. Just because a set is expensive, however, it doesn’t mean they will be worth buying... I couldn’t tell you what my traveling set are... (I believe they came with my cheap mp3 player several years ago). The reason why I use them when I travel is because (1) they’re small—just a cord and a couple of earbuds, compared to my bulky, padded, over-the-head Sennheiser set, and (2) they are, as far as my ears can tell, the same quality as my spendy set.

I spent $100 on a pair of Sennheiser HD448. They are absolutely wonderful. They are over-the-ear and look huge, but they are incredibly lightweight, just as the HD280 are. I used a pair of Spectra until I got those. They make a huge difference for me. The difference in sound quality is amazing.

What you get with professional-grade headphones is accuracy, comfort, and durability. With the RIGHT set you also get acoustic isolation. This can only be assessed in person. It was a major factor in my choosing the beyerdynamic DT 770 Pro, which I have been using for the last 16 years. (The same pair!) You usually won’t find this gear in a store where you buy CDs or in big-box stores. You need to go to a pro music store... It is common practice to bring a sample of your favorite music in order to compare. Online stores are okay if you already know what you want. Pricing is usually better... I have a $15 pair of drugstore ‘phones which sound nearly as good as my DT 770 for spoken word, but are only moderately comfortable and literally fall apart with regular use... Another problem with consumer-grade ‘phones is that they are usually designed to emphasize bass and treble frequencies. It makes rock music sound good out of cheap players, but is inherently inaccurate and not conducive to hearing the spoken word. Pro-grade gear is referred to as “flat,” meaning it does...
Graduate Spotlight

Carmella Jones

My name is Carmella Jones. I am 39 years old and live in Pittsburgh, PA. I have been happily married for 15 years and enjoy reading, hiking, and watching Pirates baseball.

When my company downsized and I lost my job in banking after 18 years, I was lost. That is when I discovered the field of medical transcription. After careful research and consideration of many medical transcription schools, I chose Career Step and their Medical Transcription Editor program. I couldn’t have made a wiser decision. The program was difficult, but I was able to work at my own pace. I graduated with high honors after about ten months in the program. The student resources that are available to you while you work through the program are exceptional. The Career Step staff is always there to offer support.

After graduation I was amazed at the amount of services available to me through the graduate support staff. They assisted me in creating my resume and continuously notified me of any possible job leads. It was only two weeks after graduation and I already had interviews with three different companies! I was able to easily pass the assessment tests that companies require because of the excellent training I received through Career Step. I even had one company representative comment that Career Step graduates always seem more prepared to enter the work force than graduates from other medical transcription schools.

I was lost. That is when I discovered I had no idea how to work transcription. That is when I discovered Career Step and their Medical Transcription Editor program. I couldn’t have made a wiser decision. The program was difficult, but I was able to work at my own pace. I graduated with high honors after about ten months in the program. The student resources that are available to you while you work through the program are exceptional. The Career Step staff is always there to offer support.

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Most medical transcription positions require on-the-job experience, but because Career Step has such an excellent reputation for producing highly trained medical transcriptionists, many companies will hire new graduates. Two weeks after graduating from the MTE program, I accepted a job offer from a company as an independent contractor. I am able to set my own hours and have the convenience of working from home.

I am grateful to Career Step for allowing me to embark on a completely new career path at the age of 39. If you work through their program and take advantage of all that Career Step has to offer, you will succeed.

- Carmella Jones

Continued from pg. 6 - Mixed Media

NOT emphasize or diminish one set of freqs over another… To answer the OP's final questions, yes, they make a difference. My productivity did go up, and for those of you who don't have great speakers around, music sounds fantastic through them after work. For best results look for products made by microphone manufacturers—AKG, Audio-Technica, beyerdynamic, Sennheiser, Shure, Sony, Bose, and others.

I spent $100 on a pair of Sennheiser, I use Bose. I have the Bose Triport that I do like, but I LOVE the Bose QuietComfort 15 that I also have! The QuietComfort are noise canceling also and so that in itself makes me feel I can understand the doctors better because I don't pick up all the sounds that may be going on around me... So my answer is yes, the more expensive headphones are totally worth it. I used the Triports for 3 years constantly until I purchased the QuietComforts, which I have been using for about 4 years now. Both are still in great shape and I have never had a problem with either. I wear them 8-10 hours a day at least. Both pairs are very comfortable also. I did spend $175 on the Triports and $300 on the QuietCosturts but so far figure $500 averaged out over 7 years' time equals about $71 a year, which equals about $5 per month, so really not much of an expense. I am willing to bet that a person would be replacing the cheaper ones often enough to equal or exceed that price.

Sometimes my ears get sweaty... when I try to use my Phillips noise cancelling headset, so that is why I like the Spectra earbuds - lightweight, loose in the ears, but stay on. I am starting to realize I could probably hear better with a different pair though. The things I cannot make out no matter how hard I try seem to be filled in by QA quite easily...

As for the difference...I had used iPod ear buds when I first started. They were horrible. I switched to the Spectra USB set, which was marginally better, but no noise cancelling. When I received my AKG pro headphones from a friend, it was like a whole new world opened up. I heard things I never heard before and my accuracy went up exponentially. Too bad they are painful. I do not recommend on-ear models for prolonged wear. They sound amazing, but I find that comfort is just as big of a priority if you're working full time.

I do like Bose's QC but hate looking for a battery when it dies. I do have rechargeable batteries but they disappear one by one so whenever there's a buy 1 get 1 free deal (especially the 25-pack batteries), I stock up just in case.

As for the Beyerdynamics, they are comfy and sound great. The only gripe I have so far is they don't play nice with my glasses...
Finders Keepers

What is Benchmark Knowledge Base?

Years and years ago we used to send out a heavy box of reference books with each enrollment package so our students would have primary resources to use for research while going through the program. This box primarily included a huge medical dictionary, a drug reference, and a medical/surgical word list. Now, each new student in the Medical Transcription program gets a 15-month subscription to Benchmark Knowledge Base instead, and this resource collection effectively takes the place of this heavy box of reference books. We were excited when Benchmark KB became available because we could offer more resources at a comparable price, without the shipping hassles. It includes a large selection of Stedman’s publications— including the Quick Look Drug Book, Abbreviations, Acronyms & Symbols, Medical and Surgical Equipment Words, Medical Terms and Phrases, and Stedman’s Medical Dictionary—in electronic form, online, via the Benchmark website. This is an extremely important part of your program; without access to these primary references, you cannot adequately work through the training program.

The prompt to register for access to Benchmark KB is on page one of Medical Word Building, one of the first modules in the program. There’s a lot of information to process upon enrollment, and it’s understandable to want to skip over some of it, especially if you’re not sure how it will help you at that moment. If you skipped over this prompt, return to page one of Medical Word Building and register right away.

Benchmark KB is better than any public website because its content is the same as you’d find in the text versions of the primary references. You can count on it to be correct, without worry. For example, the Quick Look Drug Book (QLDB) is especially valuable when determining the generic versus name brand status of a drug. Lots of otherwise good pharmaceutical websites contain errors with drug capitalization. If you use one of these free sites and it results in an error, you’ll simply be told that the site is not a primary reference, the error stands, and you should have used the Quick Look Drug Book within Benchmark KB instead. If you can verify it on Benchmark KB, it’s good enough, and we’ll even accept this as reason to make a change in the program.

The Benchmark KB site is easy to use. Simply log in, click on the MT Tools tab, and you’re ready to go! Any term you enter in the start your search here box will automatically be searched in all of the Stedman’s publications listed above, and the results will pop up in the white field on the left, with specific information (definitions, etc.) showing in the blue field on the right. If you don’t know how to spell a word, click on Enable Phonetic Search (just above the search field) and then type in what you can hear of the word or phrase. This works like any sounds-like or wildcard search on any site, and while the results may or may not always turn up what you’re looking for, you’ll probably get a step closer in your search.

You’ll also notice a tab called Physicians. This is used by working MTs who need to verify doctors’ names; students don’t need to use this tab, so simply ignore it while in the program. There’s also a tab for The Book of Style, a respected language style guide published by AHDI. Some employers use this as their company style guide, and we refer to it in the course. If you find yourself working for a company that uses the BOS, you’ll need it in your reference library, but if your employer does not use it, you won’t; for the program, it’s there as a reference option so you can be familiar with what it is. There’s also a very handy tab called Lab Values, which contains tables and charts with normal laboratory results for many tests.

It’s definitely worth it to click on the Support tab for more information about how to use Benchmark more effectively. You’ll find a Help option that contains the entire user’s guide in three chapters, a Tutorials option that takes you to a short video presentation showing how to perform the basics of Benchmark research, and a Contact Us option that allows you to send an email query directly to Interfix (the parent company of Benchmark KB).

It’s always surprising to talk to students and learn they’re slugging their way through Clinic Notes without any resources because they didn’t register with Benchmark in their first week, or they registered but never logged on to the site. They are always surprised—and often relieved—to realize how much reliable research information is available and included with the program. Sometimes students are reluctant to use Benchmark KB because it’s another site with another login to remember. This is true, but what you will gain is definitely worth bookmarking the site on your computer (one click will get you there!) and setting a login you can remember. If you haven’t registered for and learned to use this tool by now, please return to page one of your Medical Word Building module and follow the prompts. After just a little bit of time investment, you’ll be really glad you did!

- Jill McNitt
CS Student Support Team
Working at Home: Mommy Guilt

It’s no secret that one of the things that appeals to many medical transcription students is the fact that the job can be legitimately done from home, so moms (and dads) can stay with little ones and minimize the daycare bill as a working expense. The reality of working with small children around is often a bit different than what was imagined, however. Babies and toddlers don’t respect turnaround times or expiration dates, school-age kids from kindergarten through high school hit the house in the afternoon demanding all the attention they can get, and during summer vacation it’s even more challenging.

We all love our kids—that’s a given. Of course we want to spend time with them because they’re the most wonderful thing that ever happened to us, and they’re just so darn cute! When you have a deadline to meet, however, and you put on a video to entertain them for an hour so you can finish your work, you may feel a little guilty, right? It’s okay to admit it—we all feel this way sometimes!

Aside from loving our children to pieces, we, as today’s parents, often also feel a lot of pressure to interact with and entertain our kids all the time. We get a lot of parenting messages hinting that each moment must be filled with organized activity or quality interaction and that, as good parents, we must always be available to our children, no matter what. You might get the feeling that irreparable damage is sure unless you are there to coach and guide every move and word, and it can make you really anxious. It’s also easy to feel like we’re not doing as good of a job as our parents did, certainly not our grandparents, and the further back in time we go the rosier the picture gets. In today’s world there’s just no way we’re spending as much time with our kids as past generations did, right?

Well, maybe we are. Margaret USDA, assistant professor of sociology at Syracuse University, who co-authored a study about depression in stay-at-home and working moms says this:

“Parents now are spending a lot more time interacting with their kids than 1970s parents did. In fact, research shows that today’s working mothers are spending as much time with their children as the last generation’s stay-at-home mothers did.” The article goes on to observe that “while there may have been room in the schedule for Tupperware parties and Days of Our Lives back then, modern stay-at-home mothers spend plenty of time reading to their children, helping with homework, and exposing them to music classes, sports, language lessons and more.”

Aha! So that’s why we’re so tired! I know I’ve always done my best, and at some point I get weary of being told my best is not good enough, so I was very happy to read this—and it rang true to me. Now, let’s extrapolate just for a second. If the last generation of stay-at-home moms spent only as much time with their kids as we do now and those kids grew up fine and that time is remembered fondly as an ideal time for a kid to grow up, then perhaps we’re worrying a bit too much, eh? Maybe the way to make sure the paycheck isn’t compromised by the time you spend with your kids and your kids aren’t compromised by the time you spend working is to just relax about it! Perhaps the good

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softener or African diseases, you decide to take a different approach. What if you looked up heart? The second, third, and fourth results show something like this: heart (See also COR, HE, ht, HT). Hmm. Maybe you’re hearing ker but it’s really spelled cor— or car—. After a few unsuccessful attempts by typing cora and cara and caro and even caro b, you give it one more try. Being almost positive that the word doesn’t end after the first two syllables, you give Benchmark a clue by including an asterisk at the end of the word and typing a space and then the letter b since you’re pretty sure that’s what the second word starts with. After trying a few different spellings, you type in caro* b* and ah HA! You’ve successfully narrowed the list down to 10-14 results. Now, it’s smooth sailing. You skim the list and find carotid bruit. From the definition, you know that “a systolic murmur” very well relates to the heart. Even though the murmur is not heard in the aortic area, it is heard in the neck and is produced by blood flow in the carotid artery. Ah, that’s why, “Neck is supple,” was dictated just one sentence earlier in the report. See, you were right—it wasn’t kerah-boat.

Now, this may seem like a long process, but all in all, it probably takes five minutes to execute. Use your common sense, try different spellings, give your medical dictionaries some clues, and most importantly, don’t stress over it. If you search for five minutes and are not finding any leads, don’t spend another 45 minutes trying to decipher that one word or phrase. Know your boundaries. Yes, we were able to solve the carotid bruit mystery, and we may have gotten lucky by finding a similar spelling of the first word in our search for heart, but you may not be able to solve all of them. That’s okay. It’s important to remember that there’s nothing wrong with leaving a blank flag or a guessed, flagged word. What we want to prevent is you getting bogged down by one word or phrase and swearing that it’s one thing when it’s not.

Remember—it’s not always what you hear; it’s what the doctor actually says. With the help of Benchmark, other reputable medical dictionaries, search engine expertise, your native intelligence, and just plain logic, you’ll be able to turn kerahboots into carotid bruits with no sweat.

- Melanie Gassin
CS Skills Assessment Team

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Dear Susan—

I can’t seem to make myself study. I really want to work from home, but between taking care of my two year old and all the stuff that needs to get done around the house, it seems like I don’t have any time left. I’ve been in the course for six months and I’m still in Medical Word Building. Can you help?

Frustrated with Myself

Dear Frustrated—

I wish I had a magic wand to wave over you to create more time! Unfortunately, I don’t, and I can’t come to your house to make you study, either; the only option left is for you to take control of your time and actions so you can reach your goal.

You said you want to work from home, so take a look at why that’s important to you. Are the reasons still as compelling as they were six months ago? They probably are, so there’s your motivation!

Next, sit down with the program for an hour or two and use the Study Planner feature to create a plan for how you will complete the training by your goal date. Make sure you are realistic with your time, but also realize you may have to be a little creative. Many parents of small children find their best opportunity to study is when the kids are asleep—early in the morning, during naps, and after bedtime. This may not be the most convenient schedule for you, but it is often what ends up working best, so it’s worth considering. Break down your progress into weekly or daily goals and write them down on a calendar that’s posted where you see it every day. Once you spend this time creating a plan for yourself, you’ll find you have a better idea of the scope of the project, and you’ll feel better about it because you know what’s involved.

Finally, commit to the schedule you have worked out. It won’t happen just because you planned it—you have to DO it! Sitting down to the computer, logging in, and doing the work must be as important as anything else that might come up—including things like visiting friends or housework. Only a real emergency should take precedence, and real emergencies are rare. How do you make this work? Log in to the course. Work through a page and submit it. Repeat as needed.

If you take this responsibility for your actions, you will accomplish your goal—which feels wonderful—and you’ll find the discipline you develop will benefit you once you begin working from home, too.

Sincerely,

- Susan Tuckett, CMT
CS Student Support Team
It’s fun to read speech recognition platform blunders, and it’s just as fun to read the Sunday comics. So let’s double the fun of this issue’s Speech Wreck feature and read a speech rec blunder comic! (Reading it on Sunday is optional.)

(Note: “SR” refers to what the speech recognition program interpreted the dictation to be. “D” refers to what the doctor actually dictated.)

Speech Wreck by Heather Garrett

SR: This nursing home resident has pirate caregivers.
D: This nursing home resident has private caregivers.
old days have been bit idealized, and we tend to be really hard on ourselves in the here and now. A wise forum member and graduate of the MT program said it perfectly:

“My great grandma washed clothes by hand, plucked chickens for dinner, probably brought in wood for the kitchen stove, tended a garden, canned food for the winter, sewed for her family ... She was home for her kids, no question, but did she feel the need to always be doing something with them or for them? Nope. She couldn’t. That was life. She helped them and loved them and did the best she could, but she wasn’t Wonder Woman and neither am I. I don’t pluck the chickens or wash laundry by hand; that’s why I work. I have to have $$ to go down to the store and buy my laundry detergent and already plucked (and sometimes even de-skinned and de-boned) chicken. My grandparents turned out to be hard working people who raised good families, were good citizens, and did their best, too, so I would consider Great Grandma a successful mom. There is no doubt that you are doing the best you can for your [children], and as they grow they will see that and know that you love them. Really, what more could they ask for in a mom?”

What more, indeed?

For more information go to: http://glo.msn.com/relationships/must-be-nice-1534535.story#?stackState=0__%Erelationships%2Fmust-be-nice-1534535.story%3FpageId%3D3

And check out this interesting blog called ‘Working Moms Against Guilt’ at www.workingmomsagainstguilt.com.

-Jill McNitt
CS Student Support Team